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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that genre/discourse community interaction is a critical element in the teaching of English for Special Purposes (ESP). All text is intended to promote interaction between writer and audience. Authentic texts generally have a central purpose: to change opinion, introduce a new idea, or encourage a specific action. The principle features of a written text that qualifies it as a genre include: (1) a name by which members of the discourse community can readily identify it, such as "grant" or "memo"; (2) a characteristic form and style that distinguish it from other genres; (3) a specific form and style that serve communicative or community purposes; and (4) conventions of form, style, and purpose within a range of permitted variation. Students of ESP must be introduced to each of these features. Suggestions for classroom instruction are to: begin with familiar genres; use authentic texts that are also prototypes accepted within the targeted discourse community; use expert readers and writers as resources concerning text purpose, form, and style; contextualize texts; and emphasize features necessary to community purposes. (MSE)

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ISSUES IN ESP FOR THE 90'S

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Several months ago, when I wrote the abstract for this paper, I decided to discuss two terms as they related to ESP teaching and learning, genre and discourse community, beginning with the latter, term discourse community since it is in discourse communities that genres live. However, after reviewing the literature and talking to ESP colleagues at conferences, I find that I must begin by working with the term genre since there is so much misunderstanding about its meaning and, in many cases, rejection of the implications for genre and discourse community research and teaching.

What appears to be the current situation in ESP in its understanding of genres?

As I travel to various parts of the world, I find that ESP practitioners are still very interested in analysis of isolated texts, i.e., in examining texts for various features that appear to be prevalent without concern for the sociolinguistic implications. For example,

A. researchers and teachers are using Hasan's "cohesive harmony" scheme to examine the interaction of grammatical function and topic depth and maintenance,

B. they are examining metaphor in texts in various disciplines,

C. they look at macro-structural features, e.g. extending Swales' famous moves in article introductions,

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D. they analyze how topics are marked.

E. or they are concerned with the use of metalanguage in texts.

This is important and interesting work; however, it is not the whole story, for isolation of features in decontextualized discourses is just what the genre advocates argue against. Instead of beginning with micro- or macro-analyses of decontextualized texts and oral discourses, the genre experts tell us that when we select texts for research and instruction, we should first consider the interaction between the community of readers and writers in which the text is a means of communication. We should think of text not as an isolated document but as what Miller (1984) calls "social action" , i.e., a discourse acting to further communication between the interactants. Thus, any analyses of the texts themselves should take this interaction into communication. We should ask initially, "What purposes do these particular features of texts serve within the discourse communities in which they are vehicles for social action?"

In many cases in these reader/writer environments, authentic texts are written to change things: to argue a new idea with an audience, to complain to a distributor, to encourage readers to donate money, to come to a party, etc. If, then, we teach and study authentic texts, say the genre analysts, we can view them as efforts designed by the writer to change an attitude or a behavior among readers within the community addressed.

Here is one example from my own work: in article published in TESOL Quarterly this spring (1993), I discuss interviews with grant

writers in electrical engineering whose lives depend upon their ability to use these genres, the grants, to convince the readers at the National Science Foundation to continue to give them funds for their research. Though I was interested in the features of the texts that the engineers wrote, the writers were much more interested in discussing the social action issues--and the processes through which they went to understand and persuade their audiences. For these experts, the text was an afterthought, produced after considerable audience analysis was completed. In these very important situations, the sociology of the situation drives much of the text form and content.

I must point out that our students are not always given opportunities to analyze audiences for whom texts are written. Again, I turn to Miller (1984) as well as to Bazerman (1988) and Swales (1990) for my discussion. For each of these theorists, discourses can qualify as genres if they share a number of features. To assist myself in understanding this literature, I put these criteria into my own words, which I present here. Here is how I answer, for myself and my students, the question, "What are the principal features of written texts that qualify them as genres?"

1. NAME RECOGNITION: Genre are discourses that initiated members in a community can give a name to. For example, grant writers and their readers in engineering can identify grant proposals; workers at IBM can identify a memo; the complaints department in a department store can identify a letter of complaint and can produce

a letter of adjustment; researchers can identify a research article (Swales, 1984). Newspaper readers recognize an editorial; teachers recognize letters of excuse from parents; doctors recognize patient records (Schryer, 1993) and prescriptions. Most of us who cook recognize shopping lists. Daily, we distinguish among the genres to which we are exposed and we react to them accordingly.

What those in the community of writers and readers share are schemata for the genres that they use for communication. For them, there is a name for the texts. This is why, in my research, I always ask an expert, "What do you call this text?" And secondly, "Why is it important to members of your community?"

2. FORM AND STYLE SIMILARITIES: Why can communities of readers recognize their genres? Miller (1984) tells us that "a genre is composed of a constellation of recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic" (p. 21) Let's repeat the important terms here: genres are recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic. We can call elements of these forms "moves"; we can call them "titles and headings"; we can call them a variety of things. Whatever, they are called, they assist a community's writers and readers in identifying a genre and distinguish it from other genres they know.

Rentz (1989) tells us that the "forms" to which Miller refers cannot considered as simple, rigid formulas, however, [Move 1, Move 1...]. Rather, they should be thought of as "recurring verbal responses to particular shared contexts...[Readers have] verbal schemata, acquired over the course of repeated readings, stored in

the mind as interpretive tools, and used or revised as new phenomena come in" (p. 197). How do we develop these schemata? Let us think back to how we learned to write and publish articles: by reading them and thinking about how they are structured and how argumentation is built.

Let's think a minute about a written genre with which you are familiar, which is an integral part of the social action in your discourse community. Name the genre. What form or style features does it have that distinguish it from related or other genres?

3. METALINGUISTICS:

Fully as important to understanding the community's genre concepts is a discussion of metalanguage (Enkvist, 1990), those features of a genre that go beyond the actual words of a text. Metalanguage includes the visual representation of the text on paper, the care with which it was produced and other, non-linguistic elements.

Recently, I was working with a group of teachers, attempting to discuss genres and getting nowhere. Finally, I asked them these questions: "What distinguishes letters from other written forms, e.g., term papers?" Then, "What kinds of letters must be handwritten? "

The answer to the second question was universally emphatic: "Thank you notes must be handwritten", especially for wedding or shower gifts. Particularly vociferous was one of the teachers had received, belatedly, a type-written thank you note for a carefully-selected wedding gift given to the daughter of one of her friends.

She was offended! Others agreed that typing/handwriting and other non-verbal features of texts are very important, both within their adult community and in their student papers. We then moved to discussing the teachers' stated and unstated metalinguistic preferences for the products that students produce in the classroom and those features of texts that offend them and may result in a poor grade. My favorite story about metalinguistic features was told by one of my graduate students who was put off by writing for years because one of her college instructors lowered her grade for having margins a bit off what was required. The teacher apparently spent most of his time measuring the margins while grading papers.

I know, too, that as co-editor of a journal, the metalinguistic features of texts can influence our reviews. If a manuscript is carelessly done, Tony Dudley-Evans, John Swales and I think "Well, this person didn't care enough to follow the rules. Perhaps the text is as carelessly written as the typing or formatting indicates." On the other hand, if great care is evident, we find it more difficult to reject a manuscript.

3. FORM AND STYLE SERVE COMMUNICATIVE/COMMUNITY PURPOSES: So far, I have mentioned that genres can be identified, by name, by members of a discourse community, that they have reoccurring form and style features that are recognized by writers and readers, and that there are metalinguistic features that affect those who read them.If we were to stop here, however, we haven't gotten very far past the discourse analysis of isolated texts that is still common in our profession.

For those of us who are Social Constructionists, i.e., who believe that the community of readers forces the writers, particularly the novice writers, into particular discourse forms and writing styles, we must look further into the community of readers and its values and ask:

What purposes do a genre's form, style and other features serve for this community? Or, why do the experts write a text in this way?

Miller (1984) tells us that a genre is a recurrent, significant action taking place within a community of readers. Thus, in considering authentic texts as genres, we must not only consider how the texts are recurrent but what place they play in the significant action between writers and readers.

How do we understand social action as reflected in texts? As ESP practitioners, we must interact with experts to begin to understand why they use certain forms and styles--and what variations within the conventions they accept among novices and experts.

I would like to begin with the recurrence issue and with academic written genres of various types to help us to think about how recurrence and social action interact.

I'm convinced that one reason ESP has remained interested so long in science is that scientists appear to have somewhat more stable texts than do experts in the humanities. Rhetorical theorists tell us that this is so, that although scientific texts change, they also represent considerable reoccurrence: that there

is some stability in text form and style though there are changes in content.

Particularly conservative is school reading and writing in the sciences. (Myers, 1992) When I interview my students in engineering, for example, they know precisely how their lab reports are structured. They have complete confidence in their ability to reconstruct the moves in lab reports because they always do it the same way. When we look at what novice readers are exposed to in many science classrooms, we find that textbooks play a central role in students' education, much more so than in the humanities and social sciences, where instructors, at the university level at least, move rapidly away from textbooks into other genres, e.g., novels, monographs, and essays.

In an excellent article published in English for Specific Purposes, Myers (1992), using Thomas Kuhn and others, discussed the role that textbooks as school reading play in the lives of novice scientists. He points out that textbook are predictably organized, but that the most important thing we must understand as ESP teachers is the role that texts play in giving students a kind of homogenized view of the field providing only "facts" upon which there is consensus among the experts, i.e., by giving them the canon. What is written in textbooks is thought, by students, to be accepted fact; little is said about how these so-called facts, the current canon, are arrived at. Myers (1992, p. 5), in discussing the weaknesses of textbooks in terms of their social value within the scientific community, quotes Thomas Kuhn as

saying:

> Except in the occasional introductions that students seldom read, science texts make little attempt to describe the sorts of problems that the professional may be asked to solve or to discuss the variety of techniques that experience has made available for their solution. Instead, these books exhibit, from the very start, concrete problem-solutions that the profession has come to accept as paradigms, and they then ask the student, either with pencil and paper or in a laboratory, to solve for himself problems closely modelled in method and substance upon those through with the text has led him. (Kuhn, 1963, p. 353)

Thus, the manner in which novice readers read textbooks, the ways in which writers write textbooks and the social purposes that textbooks serve all vary considerably from the factors that influence authentic genres, such as a research article, as produced by expert readers and writers in scientific discourse communities.

Myers (1992, p. 13) delineates important distinctions between how experts and novices read authentic texts and textbooks. He says that the

Reader of an article:	Reader of a textbook:
*sorts new knowledge from old	*arranges facts in order

*attributes credit to researchers	*separates "facts" from researchers
*assesses the certainty of statements	*takes knowledge as accepted
*infers cohesive links using knowledge	*infers knowledge using cohesive links
*traces the relations to other texts	*uses only the textbook
*evaluates the illustrations, formulae and use of citations	*uses illustrations and formulae to clarity ignores citations

Sometimes real genres, such as grant proposals and research articles are also predictable structurally, though here again, it's important to think about why, given the community of readers and writers. I must point out that even in the United States, many engineers and scientists speak English as a second language. In many engineering schools, we have more international students than native-born. Often, these bi-lingual speakers are more conservative about form and style because a stable genre provides some predictability in their second language situation. However, the ways that they read texts and use variable features such as formulae and illustrations identify the readers as expert or novice, no matter what their first languages may be.

But let's return to the issue of predictable form in the international scientific community, forms--and styles--that seem

to serve well the social action purposes of the international community. In a visit to North Africa, I spent some time looking at published agronomy research articles. Not surprisingly my colleagues and I found that they are predictable in form and grammar, right down to the use as "however" as a conjunct between the second and third move in the introduction. "Why is this?", we asked the experts. And we were told that it's because authors of these articles are writing in a second language and therefore follow more closely the "model texts" already published in the international journals, varying them as their own research dictates. Schryer (1993) tells us that these writers of articles follow how the "dominant elite do things." (p. 209) Only when you become a famous member of the elite group can you make major changes in form and style and still be accepted by the community. But then, you probably won't be writing what the community believes to be a conventional version of the genre.

Even in the humanities and social sciences, communities do contribute to this genre stability, though much less so. Recently, I was at a discussion group in which a number of literature faculty and anthropologists were talking about a volume which was claimed to be an ethnography by the author. The anthropology faculty were irate--the author had followed none of what they saw to be the conventions of ethnography in form or style, e.g., an emic perspective, detailed analysis of the data, a secondary persona of the writer. The anthropology faculty believed very strongly that they knew what a good ethnography was...and this was not an

example!

Why this insistence on the genre as the experts recognized it? Because a genre for the less secure, more conservative members in a discourse community reflects shared community values at any point in time, its implicitly but tightly held views about the world. Gross (1982, p.935) in an article about the rhetoric of science, for example, says the following:

> science is deeply rhetorical; stylistic choices conspire in the creation of the world as meant by science; organizational choices imitate the approved means of achieving access within the world.

4. PERMITTED VARIATION IN FORM, STYLE AND PURPOSE. Thus, there are reoccurring forms and styles in genres, features of texts and spoken discourses that permit expert listeners and readers to identify what they are. Initiated members of discourse communities are particularly insistent that the novices follow these conventions. This is not to say, however, that no changes occur in genre style and format. For Miller tells us that in time, genres "change, evolve, and decay" (1984, p. 163). And even at one point in time, there are variations in texts that may be permitted--but not always--as in the case of the ethnography mentioned above -- especially if the author of the text is known in the community.

Elbow (1991, p. 139) tells us that

> There are subtle differences between the discourse of people who are established in the

> profession and those who are not--particularly those with tenure. Certain liberties, risks, tones and stances are taken by established insiders that are not usually taken by the uninitiated.

Not only the writer but the community may recognize some differences at any point in time, perhaps because some genre concepts, such as lab reports, are more concrete to the community and others are defined more generally. Schryer (1993) when writing about what people call reports, for example, notes that what "counts as a valid report changes from organization to organization in terms not only of content but also of form and style." In the case of reports, then, it is the purpose that remains constant, but considerable variation is permitted to meet the needs of a particular organizational context.

Other genres, particularly those that our students come in contact with in school, may not vary as much. In an article I wrote about the kinds of texts to which undergraduate students are exposed, for example, I note that they are asked to read and produce a limited set, e.g. essay examinations and lab reports in writing; textbooks and perhaps a few other, more authentic genres, in readin.

What am I saying about variation in genres, and what we can teach using our understanding?

1. The most stable feature of genres seems to be purpose: to report, to give back information (e.g. in an essay examination) to integrate sources in a synthetic paper, to argue.

2. Form reoccurs, or the genres can no longer be identified. But there is variation depending upon the demands of the community and the purposes of the readers and, if the text is written as an assignment, the reader often varies form to make it what s/he considers appropriate for a particular audience.

3. What is permitted by expert readers of expert writers may not be permitted of novices. Expert readers critique and question; novices repeat. And writers have the same roles.

Let me give an example from my own recent experience of the novice phenomenon. A group of my students was enrolled in an introductory geography class in which the instructor assigned a take-home essay examination. He provided a prompt and a paper length, but said nothing about the form and style of the text.

Because I knew that he had 100+ papers to grade, I suggested to the students that they use headings and underlining in their papers, thus making their papers look more like research articles than like essay examination responses.

Can you guess what happened? The instructor had no interest in initiating these young students into his discourse community. The only thing that he thought my students were capable of was to write a five-paragraph essay in the old, composition style that is so popular in the United States. Thus, he penalized my students for providing reader-considerate features in the texts that they wrote for him, helps that look more like what he writes as an expert. They were angry with me--and I was angry with the instructor for his low expectations and his lack of sensitivity to his own

discourses.

4. We may have to familiarize our students with general features of academic style before we launch into the morass of understanding genres and communities as distinguishable on the landscape of the academic terrain. I feel much more comfortable, at some level, in teaching style and its social consequences to novices rather than in teaching form, for, according to Purves (1991) Elbow (1992) and others, there are general features of academic style that we can teach with an eye to understanding their social implications in every community. What do these two rhetoricians say about general academic style?

a. There is, first of all, the convention of explicitness, in English (American) academic writing, to say specifically what is being argued. Purves says, "If there is a choice between being abstract and being concrete, be concrete. (p. 92).

After examining explicitness features in authentic discourses, I say to my students, "Why do you think that it's important to be explicit in these texts?"

b. There is the convention of topic development: "Select a single aspect of your subject and announce your thesis and purposes as early as possible" (Purves, p. 92). I ask my students, "Why a specific topic?" "Why, in this culture, do we announce theses and purposes?"

c. Then, Elbow suggests that American English writers provide "maps" or "signposts" for the reader, a metalanguage.

I ask, "What metalanguage features do you find in these texts?"

"Why are these features important to readers?"

d. A distance between writer, reader and text. Not too much intimacy. Geertz (1988) talks about the differences between "author saturated" and "author-evacuated" prose, saying that the latter is more academic. For convention's sake, I ask, "Why do writers and readers distance themselves in academic texts?" "Why, for example, do we not want to hear about personal experiences?"

e. Academic prose must "display a set of social and authority relations" (Elbow, 1991, p. 146). This is a wonderful item, and a marvelous opening for discussion in class. I ask, "What is the relationship between readers and writers in this text?" Is the writer an expert? A novice? How can you guess the answer to this question?

f. Finally, academic prose must be "rubber-gloved"...the argument cannot be a polemic, at least not among the uninitiated.

Of course all of these reasons are used with the novice, and in many cases, the expert can break the rules to create what Geertz (1983) has called "blurred genres". Tony Dudley-Evans, for example (1993) in his discussion of the debate surrounding Milton Friedman's theoretical framework (or lack thereof) in economics, notes that although identifiable genres predominate in the expert discourse community of scientists, it is through other types of spoken and written discourses, called <u>contingent</u> by Gilbert and Malkay (1984) that the controversies around a scientific issue are worked out, sometimes through, among other things, the "academic sneer" (Dudley-Evans, 1993, p. 134)

Thus, real scientists and experts in other discourse communities as well can blur their genres to suit their purposes and thus work out content, form evidence and argumentation in ways that are, in many cases, unpredictable. (see.e.g. work by Geertz, an anthropologist or Steven J. Gould, a biologist)

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CLASSROOM, THEN?

I suggest that we begin with the stable and somewhat predictable--and that we begin with the known in order to encourage students to understand the interaction of texts as social action within communities with which they are not familiar. What do we do?

1. BEGIN WITH FAMILIAR GENRES: Let's talk about the known. In a very nice article on genre mediation, Prince (1992) argues students should start their genre analysis with known texts, moving only into unknown texts when they are comfortable with the basic genre principles.

2. EMPLOY AUTHENTIC TEXTS, PROTOTYPES ACCEPTED WITHIN A COMMUNITY. We should always choose authentic texts, for both reading and writing when possible. By authentic, I mean prototypes of texts that experts believe are representative of those accepted by the community of readers and writers at any point in time. Perhaps in science classes students use a textbook; in my EAP classes, they always go to other texts as well, e.g. the lab report and research article.

3. EXPLOIT EXPERT READERS AND WRITERS. When moving into community specific texts, we should always consult expert readers and writers about text purposes, form, style, --and change. I'm

always saying to a scientist, for example, "So x, why is this a good research article?" "What changes have you seen in the way in which research articles have been written over the years you've been teaching?" (e.g., Huckin, 1987)

4. CONTEXTUALIZE TEXTS. We should always make it very clear to our students, from the start, that texts exist in and for communities of readers and writers. That we cannot isolate authentic, useful texts from the contexts in which they continue social action.

5. EMPHASIZE FEATURES AS NECESSARY TO COMMUNITY PURPOSES. When we finally get to discourse analysis, we must constantly remind ourselves and our students of the interaction between the community and the texts they employ, i.e., that there are reasons beyond texts for choices made.

Now, let's have a short look at two known texts (at least they are known to some of my students) and answer some questions (See Appendix A: Wedding invitations):

1. What would you call these texts? What is the genre? How do you know they are x? Do you recognize the genre type even if you can't read all of the words? How?
2. For what communities are these texts written? Who are the readers and writers of these particular texts? What do they have in common with readers and writers of these genres in many parts of the world?
3. What are the conventions of these texts? What

are the purposes of these conventions in form and style for the community of readers and writers?

4. How do these texts differ? In what way? Why?

After asking these questions, teachers can ask students to write their own, parallel texts, or provide a number of other extension activities.

Today, I have talked mostly about genres, how they are viewed within expert communities and whether, in fact, novices are let in on some of the secrets of the genre/discourse community interaction. I believe that our role as ESP teachers is to mediate--to go between the experts and the texts in assisting students in understanding more about the lives that genres live within growing, changing discourse communities.

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